



Getting There from Here

TRAVELING IN THE NORTHEAST

Number 1, March 2001

Intercity Passenger Rail

Passenger rail is a unique transportation asset for the Northeast. The region has developed the most extensive passenger rail system in the country, but this aging infrastructure must be continuously modernized to keep pace with changing technology and the demands of travelers. The

Express high speed passenger rail service is the most recent example of state, federal, community and private sector investment in improved passenger rail service. The commitment to intercity passenger rail is not confined to the Northeast Corridor (Boston-New York City-Washington). Investment in passenger rail is an integral part of mobility, economic development and quality of life strategies throughout the entire Northeast.

A nation's transportation system is a critical underpinning to the productivity of its economy, the well-being of its communities, and the quality of life of its people. Within the national system, the Northeast has unique transportation needs. It is the most densely populated area in the nation, but has significant rural areas; it has the oldest infrastructure as well as some of the newest, fastest, and most innovative. Transportation facilities in the Northeast are among the most heavily used, support short as well as long trip distances, and are subject to the largest variation of seasonal changes.

Investments in Rail Safety Reduce Injury and Improve Travel Reliability

Safety continues to be the highest priority of the nation's transportation programs. Investments in rail safety offer the dual benefits of reduced injuries and deaths from accidents even as they allow higher train speeds and increased reliability. Technology development and public education are critical elements of rail safety programs. The Northeast is leading the way with advanced technologies for safer rail travel. The Federal Railroad Administration and the Connecticut Department of Transportation successfully demonstrated state-of-the-art quad-gate warning devices. This advanced rail-highway grade crossing technology, which is necessary for the development of high speed rail corridors, has also been used in Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont. Continued federal and state support is also critical for expanding successful public education and safety programs such as Operation Lifesaver.

Passenger Rail Is Job Creation and Economic Development

The rail manufacturing industry has a strong presence in the Northeast, contributing to economic prosperity and creating thousands of jobs in communities and states throughout the region. Northeast companies manufacture rail cars and locomotives, brakes, cable, railroad ties, and other products, as well as provide engineering and design, communications, rail marketing, advertising, and other services critical in operating a national rail system.

Passenger rail service is also an engine of economic growth that extends beyond the rail manufacturing industry. In New York, a joint State-Amtrak high speed rail agreement to invest \$185 million to reduce travel times along the Empire Corridor is expected to provide a boost to the economy by creating jobs, providing more travel options, and promoting cleaner air. Pennsylvania's agreement with Amtrak for a joint investment of \$140 million to increase speeds along the Keystone Corridor over the next five years is expected to attract new jobs and combat the rising economic cost of traffic congestion. Rail stations

themselves can also be centers of economic development and cornerstones for downtown revitalization in communities large and small. In Baltimore, Maryland, plans are underway to turn the upper floors of the rail station into a 70-room hotel. Communities such as Dover, New Hampshire are making their downtown stations a center of economic activity and investment.

Passenger Rail Is a Growing Business

In the Northeast, as across the nation, growing public interest in passenger rail is being translated into action as states invest significant funds to bring about passenger rail service. In addition to the high speed rail investment in New York and Pennsylvania, the recent designation of a Northern New England High Speed Rail Corridor, a Boston hub with spokes to Montreal and Portland/Lewiston-Auburn (ME), builds on existing state passenger rail initiatives. The much-anticipated start-up of passenger rail service between Portland and Boston reflects sustained commitment and joint investment by the federal government, the states of Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, local communities and the private sector. New Hampshire's plans to extend commuter rail service from Lowell, Massachusetts to Nashua, New Hampshire are a building block for the proposed high speed corridor. Vermont is undertaking strategic rail investment plans, while Maine explores opportunities for service directly linking Portland to the Northeast Corridor.

Intermodal Coordination Is Increasing

Throughout the Northeast, train stations are being upgraded and transformed into intermodal facilities to provide travelers with seamless transportation. Boston's South Station provides a ready connection from the Northeast Corridor to Logan Airport, the inner-city transit system, and an extensive region-wide bus system. Massachusetts has leveraged in excess of \$53.5 million on ten intermodal centers throughout the Commonwealth. Smaller communities can benefit from intermodal transportation options as well. The intermodal facility in Wells, Maine takes people from the turnpike to bus, rail, and park and ride options. In Rhode Island, plans for a new Amtrak/commuter rail station, linked by an automated people mover to T. F. Green Airport, will provide travelers with access to Boston and points along the entire Northeast Corridor. The new rail station is part of a more extensive 70-acre economic redevelopment project in Warwick, Rhode Island. Newark International Airport's new monorail provides ready access from the terminals to rental car facilities, while frequent bus and shuttle service connects the airport passengers to the New York subways and Amtrak.

Partnerships Are Key To Intercity Passenger Rail

Partnerships among governments and between the public and private sectors are essential to the success of intercity passenger rail. States and communities are stepping forward to work with the federal government and private sector to bring about modern, efficient passenger rail service. The cooperation and support of the freight rail community is essential since commuter and intercity passenger trains outside the Northeast Corridor operate on privately-owned freight lines. In this spirit of cooperation, CSX, Norfolk Southern, and Amtrak are working with New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Virginia and the I-95 Corridor Coalition to assess critical bottlenecks to passenger and freight rail service in the Mid-Atlantic region. The integrated strategy developed in the Mid-Atlantic Rail Operations Study seeks to increase rail efficiency, expand economic opportunity, and enhance the region's ability to provide a full range of intermodal services.

What Needs To Happen Now?

- Fully fund Amtrak in FY2002.
- Create a dedicated source of federal capital funding for intercity passenger rail, with a strong role for states.
- Fully fund the Railway-Highway Grade Crossing Hazard Elimination Program (Section 1103c of TEA-21) and promote further safety research and development in FY2002.
- Continue support for Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) research and deployment.

Disclaimer: This report is one of a series of informational briefs which highlights transportation activities in the Northeast. It was prepared by the CONEG Policy Research Center, Inc., the staff arm of the Coalition of Northeastern Governors. Editors of this series are Anne Stubbs and Tara Straw of the Center.
